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Agricultural Situation

Rural Development in the European Union

2004

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Report Highlights:
The European Commission has presented a new proposal for Rural Development policy and its budget for the period 2007-2013. It suggest that in 2013 almost 25 percent of the agricultural budget will go into Pillar 2. However there are uncertainities about the budget situation since some of the Member States say too much money is going into Rural Development.

Another big issue in the new poposal is the strive for simplification and transparency in the administration. This is done by implemenmting a single funding and programming system. The Commission has been critisized for the huge administration in the SAPARD program, that has delayed the program in the new Member States.

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Introduction

Rural Development has become a bigger part of the European agricultural policy, especially with the CAP-reform. An increasing amount of the EU-budget is put into this area, however there has been non-transparency and a lack of information regarding implementation and how the money has been used in the different Member States. In the enlarged European Union, over half of the population lives in rural areas which cover more than 90 percent of the territory. This makes rural development a fundamentally important policy area.

Over the recent years the agriculture policy in the EU has shifted from supporting production to supporting producers income directly, and towards the objective of sustainable agriculture, although the amount of money going into the sector has remained the same. This is an effort to satisfy the general publics demands for food safety, food quality, product differentiation, animal welfare, environmental quality and the conservation of nature and the countryside.

A distinguishing feature of Europe's rural areas is their diversity, both in geographical and landscape features, and the different challenges they face. These challenges range from restructuring of the agricultural sector, remoteness, poor service provision and depopulation to population influx and pressure on the natural environment, particularly in rural areas near urban centers.

Rural development policy of the European Union is there to respond to the national and regional needs. The Member States play a central role in drawing up their rural development program and in implementing them. Each member state presents its plan, which is to be approved by the commission. In July 2003 the European Commission adopted a proposal on the Rural Development policy for the period 2007-2013. This proposal is supposed to be finalized in the beginning of 2005.

The objective

The European Commission recognizes that there is a close link to agriculture and a balanced development of rural areas. The objective of the rural development programs are to make sure that varied needs of the rural world must be recognized, together with the expectations of society and environmental requirements.

Structural Funds

The Structural Funds are instruments of the EU to implement Community policies for economic and social cohesion. The Funds were created to help those regions, within the European Union, whose development is lagging behind. This is done in order to reduce the differences between regions to and create a better economic and social balance within and between Member States. Four individual funds are collectively known as the EU Structural Funds, this streamlining of the funds was made in the Agenda 2000 agreement.

- ERDF, the European Regional Development Fund- contributes mainly to assisting the regions whose development is lagging behind and those undergoing economic conversion or experiencing structural difficulties.
- ESF, European Social Fund- mainly provides assistance under the European employment strategy.
- EAGGF, the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund- helps in both the development and the structural adjustment of rural areas whose development is lagging behind by improving the efficiency of their structures for producing, processing and marketing agricultural and forest products.
- FIFG, the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance- supports restructuring in the fisheries sector.

The structural fund most focused on rural development is the EAGGF.

The total budget for the structural Funds in 2000-2006 amounts to € 195 billion (not including the Cohesion Fund[1]).

The funds for rural development measures are focused on different Objectives.

Objective 1: Are regions that are the least developed and least prosperous. To qualify for Objective 1 funds, the regional GDP per capita must be at or below 75 percent of the EU average. Also included in the Objective 1 regions are the sparsely populated regions (less than 8 persons per square kilometer) of northern Sweden and Finland. Objective 1 funds are also focused on the new Member States whose rural areas are to undergo far-reaching structural changes.

Objective 2: Are areas that are considered to be facing economic structural difficulties and that need support for economic and social conversion. Approved projects in Objective 2 regions are generally entitled to financial support from a fund contributed to by both the EEC and national government.

Objective 3: Supporting the adaptation and modernization of education, training and employment policies and systems. This objective will assist regions throughout the EU except those covered by Objective 1, taking into account the general needs of areas facing structural difficulties with regard to economic and social conversion

The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)

The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) is composed of two sections: the Guidance section and the Guarantee section. It consumes a large part of the general budget of the EU.

The Guarantee Section finances in particular expenditure on the agricultural market organizations, the rural development measures that accompany market support and rural measures outside of Objective 1 regions, certain veterinary expenditure and information measures relating to the CAP.

The Guidance Section finances other rural development expenditure that is not financed by the Guarantee section, for example the LEADER+ projects.

Rural Development 2000-2006

In the 1990's, the EU had a range of instruments to meet objectives such as agricultural restructuring, local development and environmental integration. To get a better overview of projects and results those instrument were streamlined into fewer instruments. This was part of the Agenda 2000.

In the CAP-reform of 2003, the terms decoupling, cross-compliance and modulation were introduced or expanded. The aim of modulation is to transfer funds from the first pillar (direct aid payments) to the second pillar, which supports agriculture as a provider of public goods in its environmental and rural functions, and rural areas in their development. The second pillar also provides new measures to promote quality and animal welfare, and to help farmers meet new EU standards.

[1] The Cohesion Fund is a mechanism established to finance transport and environmental infrastructure projects in Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Portugal.

The second pillar

Since the Agenda 2000 reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), the rural development policy is widely referred to as "the second pillar". This emphasizes the fact that rural development and agri-environmental measures are now considered to be of equal importance to market support policy in the overall CAP framework. However for the period of 2000-2006, the budget for rural development measures only accounts for about 10 percent of the total CAP-budget.

Agenda 2000

In March 1999 in Berlin the European Council, comprising Heads of Government or States, concluded a political agreement on Agenda 2000.

Agenda 2000 is an action program whose main objectives are to strengthen Community policies and to give the EU a financial framework for the period, with a view to enlargement. The priorities were to consolidate all rural development and agri-environmental policy into a single regulatory framework. (Regulation 1257/99)

In the Agenda 2000 agreement there is a menu of 22 measures. Ranging from the retirement of older farmers, and investments in agricultural holdings to targeted environmental measures. Member States can choose those measures that suit the needs of their rural areas best. These are then included in their national or regional programs.

Modulation

The Agenda 2000 allowed Member States to transfer money from the first pillar and reallocate them to the second pillar. All CAP monies thus liberated must be matched by an equivalent funding from the member state. The precise mechanism for re-distributing money under a national modulation program may be determined by each member state.

Modulation was introduced in the Agenda 2000, in the beginning it was optional, and only the UK used this instrument. Under the 2003 CAP-reform the re-distribution of money through modulation is no longer optional. Member States must apply a certain modulation rate, which increases each year. The modulation rate for 2005 is 3 percent, 2006 it is 4 percent and as of 2007 an onwards the modulation rate will be 5 percent per year. This measure is expected to raise another € 1.2 billion annually from 2007 onwards.

However money "saved" in one member state does not have to support the rural development in that state, but could be transferred between Member States. For more information on decoupling, cross-compliance and modulation, see GAIN E23121.

EAGGF planned expenditure by main measures 2000-2006

Rural Development Measures	**Million €**	**Share** percent
Investments in Farms	4,682	9.5
Young Farmers	1,824	3.7
Vocational Training	344	0.7
Early Retirement	1,423	2.9
Less Favored areas and areas with environmental restrictions	6,128	12.5
	13,480	27.5
Agri-Environment	3,760	7.7
Afforestation of agricultural land, other forestry	12,649	25.8
Total Rural Development measures	**49,097**	**100**

Allocation for EAGGF Guarantee for rural development 2000-2006

EU-15

Member State	**Million €**	**Share** percent
Austria	3,207,9	9.7
Belgium	379,2	1.2
Denmark	348,9	1.1
Finland	2,119,3	6.7
France	5,763,6	17.5
Germany	5,308,6	16.1
Greece	993,5	3.0
Ireland	2,388,9	7.3
Italy	4,512,3	13.7
Luxembourg	91,0	0.3
Netherlands	417,1	1.3
Portugal	1,516,7	4.6
Spain	3,480,9	10.6
Sweden	1,130,0	3.4
United Kingdom	1,167,9	3.45
Total	**32,905,9**	**100.0**

EU-10

Member State	**Million €**	**Share** percent
Cyprus	74,9	1.3
Czech Republic	542,9	9.4
Estonia	150,5	2.6
Hungary	602,5	10.5
Latvia	328,1	5.7
Lithuania	489,5	8.5
Malta	26,8	0.5
Poland	2,867,0	49.8
Slovakia	397,2	6.9
Slovenia	281,6	4.9
Total	**5,761,0**	**100**

LEADER+

Leader+ is one of four initiatives financed by EU structural funds. It is designed to help rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region. Encouraging the implementation of integrated, high quality and original strategies for sustainable development. It has a strong focus on partnership and networks of exchange of experience. A total of € 5,046.5 million for the period 2000-2006 will be spent, of which € 2,105.1 million is funded by the EAGGF Guidance section and the remainder by public and private contributions.

Leader+ is structured around three actions, in addition to technical assistance:

- Support for integrated territorial development strategies of a pilot nature based on a bottom-up approach. (86.75 percent of the funding)
- Support for cooperation between rural territories. (10 percent of the funding)
- Networking (1.36 percent of the funding)

A distinctive feature of Leader is the implementation of integrated development programs for local rural areas. These are drawn up and implemented by broad-based local partnership, called Local Action Groups (LAGs). The LAGs mainly operate in the first of the three actions, where the bottom-up approach is central.

Examples of Leader projects
In Finland one Leader project has been on the island of Utö. Utö is situated in the outermost archipelago in the Baltic Sea. The island has been a Military base, which is now closing down. The Leader project is helping the habitants on Utö to keep living there by making sure they have access to services like: a year round open grocery store, a ferry to a bigger Island five days a week and broadband connection.

In Italy there is a Leader project in the mountainous areas on the highest above sea level. In these areas 48.5 percent of the population lives in isolated villages. To satisfy the needs of the inhabitants in these villages to get access to services they want such as sports, social and health needs, the project, called Taxibus, provides free transports to the main town center.

In Sweden, a project was created when the sugarproducing factory on Gotland, where sugar beat production was important, was closed down. Four organic farmers started this leader project, and the aim of the project was to use the factory to produce organic fodder pellets out of silage.

SAPARD
For the Member States that joined the EU in May 2004, structural assistance played an important role in the preparation for the accession. The European Commission had a special program called Special Accession Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD). This fund was used for structural and rural development programs in all ten new Member States. Money committed can be used until the end of 2006, however after the accession these Member States can no longer get new funds. Until 2003 the overall annual budget for the 10 new Member States was € 560 million.

The SAPARD program is now focusing on the acceding countries Romania and Bulgaria. For 2004 a total of € 225.2 million is available in the SAPARD program. About 70 percent of this goes to Romania and 30 percent to Bulgaria.

In November 2004 the EU auditors criticized SAPARD. The program was criticized for delays and other implementation problems. Also funding has been more spent on increasing the quantity of agricultural products more than on projects improving the quality. The delays in getting the SAPARD program going, due to heavy administration, led to delays in releasing the aid, also only 14.8 percent of the available budget in 2002-2003 was paid to final beneficiaries. An important implementation problem according to the Court was that potential beneficiaries lacked of own resources and had difficulties in obtaining credit. As a result SAPARD favored those who are financially strong and better organized with sufficient capital or access to loans.

Rural Development 2007-2013
In July 2004 the European Commission adopted a proposal to reinforce the Unions rural development policy and to radically simplify its implementations. This is done in an attempt to reflect the citizens' demands to focus on the environment and on the food security, following the number of food scares in the European Union.

The reinforcement of the rural development program is seen as good news, especially for citizens living in the rural areas of the new Member States, since the proposal includes measures to address their specific needs.

To simplify the administration, control, reporting and evaluation of the policy there will be only one funding and programming instrument, the **European Agriculture Rural Development Fund (EARDF).** Having one funding program is also an attempt to increase coherence, transparency and visibility of the rural development policy.

There will be three main objectives:

Axis 1: Improving competitiveness of farming and forestry
The restructuring strategy would be built on measures relating to human and physical capital and to quality aspects. It includes following measures:

-Improving and developing infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry.
-Supporting farmers who participate in food quality schemes.
-Setting up of young farmers, and retire elderly farmers earlier.
-Support for semi-subsistence farmers in new Member States to become competitive.

A minimum of 15 percent of the funding would have to be spent on Axis 1. The EU co-financing rate is maximum 50 percent (75 percent in convergence regions).

Axis 2: Environment and land management
Agri-environment measures are a compulsory component. A general condition for the measures under axis 2, at the level of the beneficiary, is respect of the National and EU mandatory requirements for agriculture and forestry, cross- compliance.

-Natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas.
-NATURA 2000[2] payments.
-Agri-environment measures.
-Animal welfare payments.

Agri-environmental measures will remain compulsory. Beneficiaries must respect the EU and national mandatory requirements for agriculture and forestry.

A minimum of 25 percent of the funding would have to be spent on Axis 2. The EU co-financing rate is maximum 55 percent (80 percent in convergence regions).

Axis 3: Improving quality of life and diversification in a wider rural development
Close collaboration between national, regional and local authorities, or bottom-up approach is the preferred implementation method for axis 3 projects, which cover areas like:

-Diversification to non-agricultural activities.
-Support for the creation of micro enterprises.
-Encouragement of tourism.
-Village renewal.

A minimum of 15 percent of the funding would have to be spent on Axis 3. The EU co-financing rate is maximum 50 percent (75 percent in convergence regions).

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[2] NATURA 2000 is a network of protected areas in the European Union covering fragile and valuable natural habitats and species of particular importance for the conservation of biological diversity within the EU. The so-called Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive form the legal basis for NATURA 2000. All MS share these legal obligations to protect territories included into the NATURA 2000 network.

However a large number of Member States are said to be unhappy about the notion of being locked into spending minimum sums on given policy areas. The Commission has taken this measure to ensure that no Member States support solely ancient forests and pleasant fields while others streamline their efforts into restructuring.

New approach for LEADER

The LEADER model is to be continued and consolidated at the EU level, although those Member States and regions that wish could apply it on a wider scale.

Each program must have a LEADER element for the implementation of local development strategies of local action groups. A minimum of 7 percent of national program funding will be reserved for LEADER. 3 percent of the overall funding for the period will be kept in reserve, and allocated in 2012/2013 to the Member States with the best results.

Less Favored Areas (LFA)

Certain rural areas are nominated as less favored, the conditions for farming in these areas are more difficult either due to natural handicap or because the area is subject to environmental restrictions.

Areas considered as less favored from an agricultural point of view are:

- Mountainous areas subject to a considerable limitation of land use and a significant increase in input costs. Mountain areas are defined by altitude and slope.
- Areas threatened with abandonment and where maintenance of the landscape is necessary. Intermediate zones.
- Areas affected by specific handicaps and in which the maintenance of agriculture is necessary to ensure the conservation or improvement of the environment, the management of the landscape or its tourism value.

Areas subject to environmental constraints are:

- Areas where farmers can receive payments aimed at compensating the costs and income losses resulting from the implementation of community measures on environmental protection, to the extent that payments are necessary to resolve the specific problems arising from these measures.

The commission draws up the lists of less favored areas and areas subject to environmental constraint, however it can be modified by the member state, who must communicate changes to the commission.

In the new rural development proposal there has been a certain change in what can be classed as LFA, and also a decrease in compensation. The Court of Auditors suggests lowering the maximum compensation for the intermediate zones from € 200/ha currently to € 150 ha.

The last few years the total amount of land area covered the LFA scheme has grown hugely, and in June 2003, 56 percent of the Unions agricultural area was designated as LFA, ranging from 1 percent in Denmark, 53,3 percent in Italy and 70,9 percent in Ireland, to 98 percent in Luxembourg.

The Court of Auditors[3] has criticized the less favored status of the intermediate zones since the socio-economic criteria originally used (in the seventies) for the delimitation in many

[3] The mission of the European Court of Auditors is to audit independently the collection and spending of European Union funds and, through this, to assess the way that the European institutions discharge these functions.

cases has become outdated, and are no longer met. It has also pointed to potential overcompensation of handicaps in these intermediate zones.

The changes proposed are therefore to review the classification of the intermediate zones. This would be based on permanent handicap criteria such as low soil productivity and poor climatic conditions. The precise criteria for soil productivity and climate (length of the growing season) will be laid down in the implementing rules. For mountain areas and areas with specific handicaps nothing changes as far as delimitation is concerned.

Financing

The draft reform on the rural development, published in July 2004, envisages the creation of two new funds in 2007, each of them financing one of the two pillars on the new common agriculture policy.

- EAFG – The European Agricultural Funds for Guarantee, finances Pillar 1
- EAFRD – The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, finances Pillar 2.

While CAP finances the EAFG on the basis of monthly declarations, the financing of EAFRD includes pre-financing, intermediary payments and final payments.

As mentioned previously the co-financing of the Member States will be decided at axis level. Each program must have a LEADER element for the implementation of local development strategies of local action groups. A minimum of 7 percent of national program funding is reserved for LEADER. 3 percent of the overall funding for the period will be kept in reserve and allocated in 2012/13 to Member States with the best results.

In the Commission proposal for the EU budget 2007-2013, rural policy for the EU-27 (including Bulgaria and Romania) would receive around €89 billion in 2004 prices. Modulation would add another € 7 billion. This represents around 1.14 percent of the total EU GDP, 38 percent of the total EU budget is for agriculture.

The share of the agriculture budget that would be reserved for rural development during the period 2007-2013 would increase from 19 percent in 2007, to almost 24 percent in 2013. For more about the EU-budget see GAIN E34051

The € 89 billion includes € 33 billion, which would fall under the budget heading of a regional policy under current rules, and compares to about € 53 billion for the EU-15 in 2000-2006, and a further € 8 billion for the new Member States in 2004-2006 (again, including certain regional funding).

The Commission has made calculations in a study, which show that if Turkish accession becomes a reality, the Union might have to spend more on rural development policy in Turkey than in all of the ten new Member States combined. Calculation shows it could take about € 2.3 billion a year out of the EAGGF, compared with around €2 billion for all 2004 accession countries. This would be due to Turkey's vast non-urban spaces.

Uncertainties in the EU Rural Development Budget

Six Member States - Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, have been pressing hard to hold total annual EU spending on agriculture to 1 percent of its gross national income, rather than the 1.14 percent urged by the Commission to fuel the Union in the aftermath of enlargement.

CAP market measures and direct payments would in practice be immune to resultant cuts, having been fixed up to 2013 by EU-15 Member States in 2002. Therefore a lower cap on spending would only add to pressure on rural funding.

According to the Commission, a budget ceiling of 1 percent would not only hold back the expansion of rural development, but it could also lead to drastic cuts in the environmental measures, animal welfare and food quality. The present budget is 1.24 percent of economic output.

The new Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel has been keeping the flow of positive rhetoric on EU rural policy, alluding for example to setting up young farmers and the need for greater vocational training to equip farmers for a greater orientation to the market as well as multifunctionality and a greater diversification of agriculture. The new Commissioner also stressed the importance of proper co-ordination between rural policy and cohesion policy, which are both to be reworked for the 2007-2013 financial period.

Financial Controls

To simplify the financial management of the CAP, the Commission is trying to make respective roles and responsibilities of the Commission and the Member States clearer and more transparent. The Member States will have to ensure that their management and control system has been set up in accordance with the various detailed requirements, they include the following:

- A clear definition of the functions of the bodies concerned in the management and control, and a clear allocation of functions within each body.
- Adequate separation of functions between the bodies concerned in the management and control, and within each such body.
- Sufficient resources for each body to carry out its mission.
- Efficient internal control arrangements.
- Effective system for monitoring and reporting.
- Reliable systems for accounting, monitoring and financial reporting.
- Arrangements for auditing of the functioning of the systems and procedures to ensure an audit trail.

Under the proposed new approach, the Commission could reduce or suspend payments for both the EAFRD and the EAFG funds, whilst the clearance of accounts and the conformity clearance instruments are used to verify the sums spent by the Member States.

The Rural Development Measures

EU Rural Development Policy	
2000-2006	**Proposed for 2007-2013**
Group 1 (38 percent of expenditure)	**Axis 1**
Investments in farms	Farm/ forestry investments
Young farmers	Young farmers
Vocational training	Vocational training and information actions
Early retirement	Early retirement
Setting up farm relief and farm management services	Setting up of farm management, relief and advisory and forestry advisory services
Restoring agricultural production potential	Restoring agricultural production potential
Investments in processing/marketing	Processing/marketing
Development and improvement of infrastructure related to agriculture	Agricultural/ forestry infrastructure
Reparcelling	
Land improvement	
Marketing of quality agricultural products	
Agricultural water resources management	
	Use of advisory services (including for meeting standards)
	Meeting standards temporary support
	Food quality incentive scheme
	Food quality promotion
	Semi-subsistence*
	Setting-up producer groups*
Group 2 (52 percent of expenditure)	**Axis 2**
Less favored areas and areas with environmental restrictions	Mountain LFA
	Other areas with handicap
Environmental protection in connection with agriculture, forestry	NATURA 2000 agricultural areas
	NATURA 2000 forest areas
Agri-environment	Agri environment/animal welfare (compulsory)
Afforestation of agricultural land	Afforestation (agricultural/non agricultural land)
Other forestry	Agro forestry
	Forest environment
	Restoring forestry production potential
	Support for non-productive investments
Group 3 (10 percent of expenditure)	**Axis 3**
Basic services for the rural economy and population	Basic services for the rural economy and population (setting up and infrastructure)
Renovation and development of villages	Renovation and development of villages, protection and conservation of the rural heritage
Diversification of agricultural activities	Diversification to non-agricultural activities
Encouragement for tourism and craft activities	Encouragement for tourism activities
Financial engineering	
	Vocational training
	Capacity building for local development strategies
	Support for micro-enterprises
	Preservation and management of the natural heritage

*Transitional measures

The European Commission claims that in this new proposal none of the former 22 measures have been excluded, however they might be grouped differently, with the objective to have a simpler implementation.

Role of the Commission versus Member State, Decentralization and simplification

On a yearly bases the European institutions will examine the progress made in achieving the Union's strategic priorities, on the basis of a Commission report that was drawn up after consulting the national activity reports and submitted to the Council together with the implementation report concerning the broad economic policy guidance.

The aim of the proposal for 2007-2013 is to clearly delimit the framework and the division of responsibility between the different actors: the Member States regions and implementing bodies on the one hand, and the Commission on the other. The proposed regulation lays down general provisions of the management and control systems and the functions of the managing authority for each program, of the expenditure approval authority, of the audit authority and of the monitoring committee.

In the field of financial management three important simplifying elements will be introduced.

- Payments and financial management will be carried out at the level of priorities rather than measure.
- The Community contribution will be calculated on the basis of public expenditure only.
- The rules of eligibility for expenditure will be largely national rather then Community based

In the area of field controls, increased confidence will be placed in the national system of financial control and certification of expenditure when the Member States are the principal financial contributors and the Commission has obtained an assurance of the reliability systems.

Issues and Concerns

The final regulation on rural development reform, which is to be completed in the beginning of 2005, will probably have a few changes from the proposal. One item that is being discussed a lot is the budget situation and how much of the budget will go to Pillar 2.

Another concern is that with the new added measures there might be less efficiency with a bigger number of measures. Voices are being raised that in order to get better targeting there should be fewer measures to choose from instead of more.

There is also the already mentioned concern about the eventual overcompensation in some of the LFA areas.

Conclusions

With a growing part of the agricultural budget going into the program for rural development, the impact on the agricultural production is likely to be affected by it. However there are concerns in some Member States that with the proposed budget there will be less money going into the rural development, since there will be 25 states sharing the money instead of the earlier 15.

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